

Building Dynamic Groups



Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry is an exciting philosophy for change. The major assumption of Appreciative Inquiry is that in every organization something works and change can be managed through the identification of what works, and the analysis of how to do more of what works. This work is a translation of David Cooperrider's work in the field of Appreciative Inquiry.

What is Appreciative Inquiry?

What is working around here? The traditional approach to problem solving is to look for the problem, do a diagnosis, and find a solution. The primary focus is on what is wrong or broken; since we look for problems, we find them. Appreciative Inquiry asks us to look at what is working in our organizations. The tangible result of the inquiry process is a series of statements that describe where the organization wants to be, based on the high moments of where they have been. Because the statements are grounded in real experience and history, people know how to repeat their success.

Through discussion, participants stir up memories of energizing moments of success creating a new energy that is positive and synergistic. Participants walk away with a sense of commitment, confidence and affirmation that they have been successful. They also know clearly how to make more moments of success. It is this energy that distinguishes the generative process that results from Appreciative Inquiry. There is no end, because it is a living process. Because the statements generated by the participants are grounded in real experience and history, people know how to repeat their success.

Through our usual problem solving process, when we receive information that 94% of our clients are happy with our work, we dig to find out why the other 6% are not happy. This process focuses on the negatives and generates feelings of discontent among employees instead of focusing on the results that have been obtained in 94% of the clients!

Focus on the positive results that are available and are attached to human stories and emotions! At the end of your next meeting, simply ask the following question:

What did we, as a group, do well in this meeting?

Be prepared for a stunned silence, followed by some comments about what could have happened. Responses can quickly turn into what didn't work. We need to be trained to use the eye that notices what went well. If we consider the problem solving mode of thinking, the assumption is that the organization is a problem to be solved. ***The basic assumption of appreciative inquiry is that an organization is a mystery to be embraced.***

Following, find two sample sets of questions to use in your organization, one for individuals, and one for groups. Use the individual form to start the process and encourage people to talk in pairs about the things that work in their organization. The group form can be used to enhance the discussion once the group begins to realize that the discussions they have about what is working well will enable them to reach group goals faster. Their combined energy to meeting the needs of their clients will spur your group to greater achievements.

References: Cooperrider, D., Srivastv, S. (1987). Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life. [Research on Organizational Change and Development](#), Vol. 1, JAI Press.
Hammond, S. (1996). [The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry](#). CSS Publishing.

Appreciative Inquiry Sample Interview Sheet for Individuals

- 1. Describe a time when you feel the team/group performed really well.
What were the circumstances during that time?**
- 2. Describe a time when you were proud to be a member of the team or group. Why were you proud?**
- 3. What do you value most about being a member of this team/group?
Why?**
- 4. Tell about the time that you were most excited about your contributions to this group.**
- 5. What are you most excited about with respect to future contributions?**

Appreciative Inquiry Sample Interview Sheet for Groups

- 1. Discuss examples of the best practices that people have seen within the organization.**
- 2. Determine what circumstances made the best practices possible (describe in detail).**
- 3. Take the stories and envision what might be. Write an affirmative statement (a provocative proposition) that describes the idealized future as if it were already happening.**